

Message Text

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AMEMBASSY CAIRO PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS PRIORITY

AMCONSUL DHAHRAN

AMEMBASSY DOHA

AMCONSUL JERUSALEM PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY JIDDA PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY LONDON

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AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

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AMCONSUL STUTTGART

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CIA WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 12296

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PGOV PINS MOPS LE

SUBJECT: KARAME'S SBTLE INVOLVEMENT OF ARMY IN SECURITY ROLE

SUMMARY: WITHOUT PUBLIC DECLARATION, RPIMIN KARAME HAS MOVED OVER PAST WEEKS TO GIVE LEBANESE ARMY SUBSTANTIAL PUBLIC SECURITY MISSION THROUGHOUT COUNTRY. WHILE MEETING DEMANDS OF MIN INT CHAMOUN, HE HAS NEVERTHELESS ACCOMPLISHED THIS FEAT WITHOUT EXCITING POLITICAL CONTROVERSY WHICH ABRUPT ARMY INTERVENTION WOULD UNQUESTIONABLY EXCITE. PRIMARY ROLE OF ARMY HAS BEEN TO RELIEVE FSI FORCES STATIONED OUTSIDE BEIRUT AND TRIPOLI,; BUT THERE HAVE ALSO BEEN MOVES TO EXPAND ARMY RESPONSIBILITIES IN AND AROUND CAPITAL. IT IS PROBABLY THAT KARAME'S TACTICS REFLECT REALIZATION THAT AVAILABLE ARMY FORCES WERE INSUFFICIENT, TO ARREST STRIFE IN BEIRUT AT ITS HEIGHT. END SUMMARY.

1. WHILE PUBLIC DISCUSSION OF THE PROPRIETY OF EMPLOYING UNITS OF THE LEBANESE ARMY TO MAINTAIN SECURITY BEIRUT HAS CONTINUED AMONG POLITICIANS, NEWSMEN AND THE GENERAL PUBLIC, PRIMIN/MINDEF KARAME HAS ADOITLY AND WITHOUT FANFARE SUCCEEDED IN GRADUALLY INSUATING ARMY PERSONNEL INTO THE INTERNAL SECURITY APPARATUS. HIS SKILLFUL MANEUVERS HAVE TAKEN THE FORM OF EMPLOYING THE ARMY TO ASSUME DUTIES IN THE CAPITAL AND ELSEWHERE II THE COUNTRY WHICH RELEASE ADDITIONAL INTERNAL SECURITY FORCE (ISF) MAPOWER FOR DEPLOYMENT IN BEIRUT AND ITS ENVIRONS. IN SOME CASES, HE HAS APPARENTLY MOVED MORE DIRECTLY TO ASSIGN UNITS OF THE ARMY TO DUTIES INSIDE BEIRUT AND ALONG ITS APPROACHES. BY AVOIDING THE NECESSITY OF OPENLY ANNOUNCING THE INTRODUCTION OF THE ARMY (WE UNDERSTAND THE GOL HAS BEEN ACTING ON BASIS OF LAWS PERMITTING GOVERNOR OF BEIRUT TO REAUEST ARMY SUPPORT FOR ISF UNITS WITHOUT THE NEED FOR THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT TO DECLARE A STATE OF EMERGENCY), KARAME (WITH INTERIOR MINISTER CHAMOUN'S COOPERATION) HAS THUS FAR BEEN ABLE TO KEEP ARMY INVOLVEMENT FROM BECOMING A HOT POLITICAL ISSUE. AT SAME TIME, WE WOULD ASSUME THAT AALL PARTIES, INCLUDING JUMBLATT AND THE PLO, CONFIDENTIAL

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AARE AWARE OF THE EXPANDED ARMY ROLE AND HAVE AT LEAST TACITLY ACQUIESCED IN IT.

2. ADDRESSEES WILL RECALL THAT, DESPITE SOME RANTING BY LEFTIST QUARTERS AND ALLIED GANGS IN TRIPOLI, THE ARMY WAS ACCORDED A PEACE-KEEPING ROLE IN A BUFFER ZONE BETWEEN TRIPOLI AND ZGHORTA ON SEPT 12. AN ESTIMATED FORCE OF 1,500 TO 2,000 MEN REMAINS IN POSITION THERE AND IN THE NORTHERN REGION OF AKKAR.

MORE RECENTLY, IN LATE SEPT, THE CTING GOVERNOR OF THE BEKAA PROVINCE REQUESTED AND RECEIVED ARMY UNITS TO CONTROL THE TROUBLED TOWN OF ZAHLE AND THE ENTIRE BEKAA VALLEY, THEREBY RELEASING AN ADDITIONAL 100 ISF PERSONNEL FOR DISPATCH TO BEIRUT. IN FACT, THE ARMY HAS NOW ASSUMED SECURITY RESPONSIBILITY FOR ALL OF LEBANON EXCEPT BEIRUT AND TRIPOLI. FINALLY, GOL ASSIGNED ARMY PERSONNEL TO ESCORT TRUCK CONVOYS OF ESSENTIAL COMMODITIES, SUCH AS FLOUR, GASOLINE AND OTHER FUELS INTO BEIRUT. IN ADDITION, MILITARY FORCES HAVE BEEN PROVIDING SECURITY FOR DAILY TRAINS OF DIESEL FUEL FROM THE REFINERY NEAR SIDON TO KEEP THE BEIRUT ELECTRIC POWER PLANTS FUNCTIONING AND HAVE MAINTAINED PTT FACILITIES, INCLUDING THE TELEPHONE CENTRAL EXCHANGE, IN ABSENCE OF CIVILIAN EMPLOYEES.

3. ARMY TROOPS HAVE ALSO BEEN ASSIGNED LESS-PUBLICIZED BUT EQUALLY VITAL DUTIES IN AND AROUND BEIRUT. WE UNDERSTAND THAT SEVERAL HUNDRED ARMY COMMANDOS HAVE BEEN ENTRUSTED TO THE COMMAND OF THE ISF FOR USE IN ENFORCING THE PROCLAIMED CEASE-FIRE. PRESUMABLY, THIS FORCE, WHICH SOME SOURCES PLACE AT 400 MEN, IS EMPLOYED IN CONJUNCTION WITH POLICE AND GENDARMERIE UNITS AND IS NOT RPT NOT READILY IDENTIFIABLE TO THE CASUAL OBSERVER AS MILITARY IN CHARACTER. THE ARMY HAS ALSO EXPANDED THE PRACTICE BEGUN IN EARLIER ROUNDS OF TURNING OVER ARMORED VEHICLES TO THE ISF AND REPORTS RECEIVED BY DATT INDICATE THAT ABOUT 75 RPT 75 SUCH VEHICLES OF ASSORTED MAKES HAVE BEEN RECENTLY ADDED TO THE ISF INVENTORY. AS IN THE PAST, THE DRIVER AND GUNNER IN EACH VEHICLE ARE MILITARY PERSONNEL AND ISF PERSONNEL ARE ADDED TO THE CREW FOR LEAVENING. IN ADDITION TO MANNING A NUMBER OF CHECKPOINTS ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF BEIRUT, ARMY PERSONNEL ARE PROVIDING PHYSICAL SECURITY FOR A NUMBER OF GOL BUILDINGS WITHIN THE CITY.

4. PERSISTENT RUMORS HAVE BEEN CIRCULATING IN BEIRUT FOR SEVERAL
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SEVERAL DAYS THAT UP TO 2,000 SOLDIERS WOULD BE BROUGHT INTO THE CITY TO PROVIDE ADDITIONAL SECURITY IN THE COMMERCIAL AREAS, INCLUDING HAMRA, AS AN ADDITIONAL INCENTIVE TO MERCHANTS AND BANKERS TO RETURN EXPEDITIOUSLY TO MORE OR LESS NORMAL OPERATIONS. REPORTS AS OF SEPT 30 WERE THAT THIRD SESSION OF "COMMITTEE OF NATIONAL DIALOGUE" THAT DAY HAD AGREED IN PRINCIPLE TO THIS MOVE, AFTER OBTAINING APPROVAL OF THE PLO. DETERIORATION OF THE SECURITY SITUATION OVER AFTERNOON AND NIGHT OF SEPT 30, HOWEVER, CAST DOUBT REGARDING READINESS OF JUMBLATT AND HIS LEFTIST ALLIES TO SWALLOW THIS MANEUVER AT THIS TIME.

5. COMMENT: SKILL OF PRIMO KARAME IN BRINGING OF AUGMENTED ARMY INVOLVEMENT WHILE SKIRTING POTENTIALLY EXPLOSIVE POTENTIAL ISSUE DESERVES TRIBUTE. WE BELIEVE THAT HIS JUDGMENT ON

THIS ISSUE MUST HAVE BEEN TEMPERED BY THE REALIZATION THAT, WHATEVER THE POLITICAL ACCEPTABILITY OF A LARGER ARMY ROLE, THE ARMY FORCES WHICH HE DISPOSES IN THE BEIRUT AREA ARE NOT THE PANACEA FOR THE CITY'S SECURITY DIFFICULTIES THAT BOTH SUPPORTERS AND OPPONENTS OF MILITARY INTERVENTION BELIEVE. GIVEN NUMBERS OF CIVILIAN MILITIAMEN AND OTHERS INVOLVED IN CLASHES; THE HEAVY FIREPOWER, INCLUDING ANTI-TANK AND ARTILLERY WEAPONS, WHICH THEY POSSESS; OTHER MISSIONS ASSIGNED TO THE ARMY THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY; AND THE WIDE AREA OF THE CAPITAL WHICH HAS TO BE COVERED, WE DOUBT THAT THE ARMY COULD HAVE APPRECIABLY AFFECTED THE SITUATION IN BEIRUT DURING THE HEIGHT OF THE FIGHTING. WE BELIEVE THAT FIGURE OF TWO THOUSAND MENTIONED AS POSSIBLE FORCE FOR BEIRUT'S COMMERCIAL AREA WOULD JUST ABOUT EMPTY THE BARRACKS AND LEAVE LITTLE OR NOTHING IN RESERVE.

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